Boxes of Prints or a Book?

Slide 1

Because isn't that what photography is about these days? It's so easy to make nice photographs that are perfectly focused and properly exposed you have so many more photographs that are usable. What to do with them? One alternative is to publish a photo book.

I'm going to address the issues applicable prior to the publishing of the book. It's going to be a "how to" only in that most of the effort in creating your book does not involve the publisher's software. There are lots of YouTube videos for that type of education.

Using on line publishers is accessible to just about everyone because the risk (both financial and critical) is minimal and within our grasp.

I would like to relate my experiences in creating some books that you might be spared some of the heartaches involved. This talk will either help you decide to or not to try to publish your book. We shall discuss the following topics.

Slide 2

Big Decisions
Publishing
Camera Geek DIY Projects
Digital Editing
Book Design
My recent experiences

Slide 3

First things first. You will not make any money from a book of your photographs. Unless of course you are already making money from the sale of your prints. Then you might have a chance at making a little bit of money. There's a whole lot of difference and distance between publishing a book and cashing the checks.

Slide 4

"Monetize artistic output."   We've already discussed this. Not gonna happen.
Broaden your audience – More people will see your work.   Books can go more places and last longer than an exhibition.
Add their voice to photographic history.   One assumes their photography is an important contribution to the history of photography.
Want validation for their work.   "Important photographers have books. If I have a book I will be important."
Want to produce something for the ages.   Something to outlast the estate sale
The medium holds the key to success.   My photographs in a book will make me a success.

Slide 5   Big Decisions

Why do you want a book?

Motivation is the operative word. What makes you want to assemble a book? What part of your ego needs to be satisfied, how much chutzpah do you have? You really have to want to make a book because it can be a really long, complicated project that will occupy a lot of your time.

What is the story?

You need a story to tell. You have to understand this from the very beginning. Everything you do when you create your book has to support the story you are going to tell. The whole focus is to tell your story.

What is the message?

When you tell your story will need a message. Stories have messages, or when we were young we often heard the phrase, "Now, the moral of the story is…" Need to keep that in mind as you tell your story. It has to have a meaning for your viewers. And speaking of viewers…

Who is your audience?

Who do you expect to read your book; Family and friends and a few photographers? People interested in the story and message you are going to tell? The story, message and audience are tied together.

Education

Are you willing to learn some new skills and new ways of looking at photographs?

You will need to learn new ways of thinking about photographs, sequencing photographs and other skills needed to make a book. It's a learning experience.

Commitment

How much time and money are you willing to invest in this endeavor?

New skills and learning take time away from what you would normally do. Are you willing to take the time to invest in this new project? Are you willing to see this project through to its end, whether the end is success or failure?

Slide 6

On a personal basis I wanted to create books to memorialize my large scale long term projects so I could have complete works in a single, small easily transferable format as gifts for friends and family.

I have about twelve projects worthy of books.

Slide 7   Publishing

Strangely enough, one of the first big decisions to make is selecting your publisher. There are lots of online services that will be happy to publish your photo book. Lulu, Shutterfly and lots of others I don't know about. Most publishers have online templates, proprietary software and you can even create a little book on your smart phone.

Slide 8

There are lots of choices. I chose Blurb because they seem to promote photographic self-publishing and one of their big selling points is they allow customers to use Adobe InDesign as a book publishing tool. I

have been using InDesign or its predecessors for almost twenty years so it was a real short cut for me to use Blurb.

Slide 9

Know the images and the number of images before you start processing. We need to distinguish between images and photographs. Images are dimensionless and exist as files in your computer. After you edit them and assign a size and resolution you may think of them as photographs.

How many photographs do you have? This is really important because it is one of the big cost drivers of the book you will be creating.

A book needs to be as long as is necessary to tell your story and not one image more. You don't decide on the number of pages first and hope to fill it out with images. You work with the images to tell the story and that's how you determine the length of the book. It's also worth noting that size and number of pages are prime determinants of the cost of your book.

Slide 10

This is the time you have to decide on your book's specifications: The physical size of your book, paper grades, page counts and cover stock. Most publishers have standard sizes and formats to choose from. You may request paper samples to see what your book will actually look like. Not a bad idea if you are not familiar with paper. Now you know what size your book will be and the type of paper it will be printed on. Along with these decisions is the most important one, length of the book. How many pages your book will have depends on how many images you have and how much you want to write about them.

Slide 11

Now you can think about image preparation. Blurb requires 8 bit jpegs at 150-300 dpi RGB at the size required for your book. Even if you choose to have your images black and white, they have to be in RGB format.

Now you know the size of the image, the resolution and the mode of the images required for your book. Now it's time to begin preparing your images for the book.

My photographs of Academy Street began over thirty years ago. I used just about every camera I have ever owned on this project. I have 4x5 and 5x7 sheet film (of different brands and emulsions) and digital RAW files in three different formats. I needed to get every image into the same final format to include in the book.

Thirty years ago I had a flat bed scanner with a negative scanning attachment that was good up to 4x5. That device is long gone. The quest is to get sheet film negatives digitized. I could have a service scan the negatives or I could buy a film scanner. Those alternatives involved spending a lot of money I didn't want to spend on a "single use" device.

Back in the olden times, there were things called slide copiers that you could fit on the front of your 35 mm SLR film camera. I made my own using a bellows and an enlarging lens. I thought I could do that in the twenty first century. I started thinking…And then I went to YouTube and found a video for a DIY copying rig. It was cheap, functional and didn't require much in the ways of mechanical skills to create.

Slide 12, 13, 14   Camera Geek DIY Project

Here's what I needed:

- LED tight table <$25 from Amazon
- Assorted hardware <$40 from Lowe's and Cabela's
- Macro lens <$300 from KEH Camera Brokers
- Old mat boards free!
- Two tripods Got 'em

I spent about half the price of a good scanner, all this stuff takes up less room than a scanner and I got to buy a new lens for my camera.

So now I can copy back lit negatives with a macro lens on my camera.

I photographed the sheet film negatives as RAW files and got them ready for editing in LightRoom

Slide 15   Digital Editing

First things first. Calibrate your Monitor. You need to do this. Everything device used by commercial printers use is calibrated. If your monitor is not calibrated your book will look terrible. I speak from experience. Use the money you saved by not purchasing a flat bed scanner to invest in a monitor calibration device and use it as directed when directed. You will not be sorry.

Now gather your images. I gathered all the RAW files from all the cameras. I put them into a Light Room collection as virtual copies. I do not change the original RAW file.

I want to process all the original RAW files with the latest version of LightRoom. Why? Because LR CC 2020 is whole bunches better than Photoshop 4.0. More features, better algorithms and easier to use.

Slide 16, 17

I had a beautiful 5x7 negative composition that was unusable in the analog darkroom because the highlights were dreadfully overexposed. I thought to myself, would HDR be able to save the day?

I made some dreadful overexposures with my digital camera of the dreadfully overexposed negatives. Once I got them into LightRoom and did a little bit of HDR magic, I got a very usable negative to convert into a positive.

Converting B&W negatives into positives is very easy. I Googled "Converting B&W negatives into positives" and found a LightRoom pre-set that converted the black and white negative to a positive.

I found that I needed to do all non-tone editing to the negatives before I converted the file to a positive image.

I also found out it does not work for every negative.

Slide 18, 19, 20

You now have bunches of beautiful RGB 8 bit jpegs at 300 dpi.

Now the work begins.

You need to prepare for part of the book design that is sequencing images. As much as you love your images it is best to mock up the book with small images. I use Adobe Bridge to make contact sheets from all those beautiful RGB 8 bit jpegs at 300 dpi images.

We'll need those proof sheets in just a few minutes.

Slide 21, 22   Book Design

How do you design a book? Stealing from one source is plagiarism. Stealing from many sources is research. I found the Wikipedia entry on book design is really pretty good for basics. Learn about Front matter, Body matter, End matter, Covers, spines, versos, rectos and satzspiegel.

Do you have any photographic books at home? Look at them, take notes, see how they are sequenced, page layouts, image layouts, see how everyone else does it, then steal a little bit from everyone.

Keep this all in mind as you begin to assemble the components of your book.

Slide 23

How do you wish to lead the viewer through your book? Chronologically, thematically, alphabetically or stylistically? Your images have to be organized to support the story and meaning you wish to convey. How to do that?

I employ a method called "Paper Dollies."

This is tough work. Some images won't make it. There will be many revisions. It takes time. You may have to go back and re-edit some images; you may have to find more images. Eventually, you will find a sequence that makes you happy. You are happy because you know what the story is and how the images tell the story. Oh, and that's the way they will be until you change it later.

Slide 24

This is the Paper Dolly version of the *Fifty Project*. It is grouped by subjects that lead into one another.

Slide 25

Your book will have to have words. You will probably need to deal with:

- Introduction/Forward
- Table of Contents?
- Captions?
- Conclusion/End notes/Tech notes
- Shameless Self Promotion/biography

Maybe there's something else you could think you want to write about.

Slide 26

Words need to be about; the story, the images and emotions. Whatever you write has to add to the experience of viewing the photographs.

Words do not need to be about; f-stops, shutter speeds, cameras, how you made the photograph, all the work you put into it, how you feel about the photographs.

In the book, the less you have about you and how you made the photographs the better it will be.

If you need to write about yourself, do it at the end of the book after people have seen the photographs because most people care more about the images that how tough it was to make them.

Why is writing tough? Because it is. It is doubly tough because we are photographers. We like pictures, not words and for us it is difficult to communicate verbally than pictorially. But we have to do it.

After you finish completing six or seven drafts of your text and have proofread it you hand it off to some other people to do the same thing.

Slide 27

When you put pictures and words on the page you will have to think about:

- Thou Needeth Fonts
    - San Serif fonts are for on screen reading - Myriad Pro
    - Serif fonts are for printed pages – Minion Pro
    - Times New Roman Shows no imagination
    - Funky fonts should not be used - Peak
    - Never, never, ever use Comic Sans

Slide 28

- Spacing
    - Between letters
    - Between words
    - Between lines
    - Between paragraphs
- Paragraphs: justified, left, centered
- Margins

Need to address the relationship between the words and the photographs on the page.

This again is a lot of eye ball, aesthetic judgements.

Slide 29   The Cover

Wait. You need a cover for the book. Here are some more decisions for you to make:

Do you have an engaging title?

A font for the title consistent with the fonts used on the inside?

You may not judge a book by a cover, but a good cover will get people to the point where they can judge the book by its content.

Slide 30   Marination

Now comes the important part. Marination. Walk away from the book for a week or two. Come back and go through the entire book again. You will find mistakes, better ways of saying things, better sequencing and several other improvements you couldn't see because you were too close to the work. In that same time, send a digital copy to some friends to do the same thing. They will see things you didn't. Correct those mistakes and make those changes that make sense. Wait a week to review those reviews again. Send the files to the publisher and print two books. When you get the book back, send one to a friend for review. Look at your book and find all the mistakes you didn't catch. Correct those mistakes.

After you correct the "final" mistakes, wait a week and review your book again. See if the things you fixed broke something else.

Now your book is complete. Send it off again to be printed to make a few more of those gift copies for family and friends. Wait for their thank you notes telling you about the typo on page 32.

Slide 31   My Experiences

I learned a lot of this through trial and error, error, error, trial and a few more errors. Should you be inclined to go to my web site you will find I have created over eighty photographic projects, mini-books, if you will. I thought it would be easy to scale up these smaller efforts to a much larger project. Now I get to tell you about what worked and what didn't work.

Slide 32   Sense of the Seasons

Sense of the Seasons grew out of two one week photographic trips to a family farm in Divide County, North Dakota. Both times we headquartered at the farm and photographed the surrounding area extensively. This approach minimizes travel time and maximizes photography time. I made a large number of images on those trips but only had a vague idea of what to do with them.

Slide 33

In reviewing images from North Dakota I found an image of a wall hanging above a stove. Close inspection of the image showed four sentiments based on the four seasons. I had an inspiration on how to use the images from North Dakota.

Slide 34

I was able to group photographs according to the Seasons of Year and Seasons of Our Lives. Spring is youth, Summer is young adulthood, Autumn is late adulthood and Winter is a time of recollection. The four folios were created at approximately the same time and with the intent of a making a cohesive statement with four distinct bodies of work.

Slide 35

The Sense of the Seasons: The Years of Our Life came together in a very easy manner. All the images were reprocessed from the original RAW files and scanned prints to take advantage of the improvements in software and increased computing power to make the images look better. All of the originals were in black and white. The book has some chapters in black and white and some in color as a design feature.

Slide 36   Dancing with Light

Dancing with Light grew out of two one week photographic trips to Capitol Reef, Utah. This time headquarters was the Motel 6 in Torrey, Utah. We again used the base camp of a single location to minimize time spent behind the wheel and maximize time behind the camera.

Slide 37

The result of these two trips to Utah resulted in eight finished folio projects each having between ten and twenty prints. The subject matter was varied and they were individual projects of different types and aspects of landscape photography. With such a large quantity of very usable images I wondered if a book of them would be a worthwhile project. As I created each of the folios I sought out a thought or theme that would unite the individual projects and photographs. In looking at the images there was no doubt the quality of light was spectacular. I remembered a lecture many years ago by David Simonton who talked of "the photographer's dance," the gyrations we call go into to properly frame the image. I chose to modify that great thought and called it "Dancing with Light." I saw my photographs as a dance among the subject, the sun and myself.

Slide 38

When you make a decision on what the project is going to be, there are going to be casualties.

Three projects never had a chance. "Luck of the Draw" was a great folio of a dry wash and was made on an overcast day which was perfect for that folio, but did not have dramatic light of the other folios. "The Compulsories" were the required photographs of a slit canyon made on kind of a whim and were not like the other folios. "Objects in mirror…" is a project of outtake photos made when I should have been making photos. It didn't fit in with the book project either.

Slide 39

Slide 40, 41

I've talked here before about the five projects I have done on Academy Street over the past thirty years. I figured that I would create my book as a chronological Walk Down Academy Street, each of the folios I created would be a chapter and it would end with the After the Memories Project, displaying the changes in Academy Street since the first project. Easy. Peasy.

I took the five projects and jammed them together and created a nice 90 page book. I was happy because it was so easy. At least until I sent it out to a friend for a review. The review was so bad, I had to stop work on it for over a month. It was that disheartening.

Slide 42

The main flaws were no real theme for most of the book, some images that really didn't fit in, the words added nothing to the images and worst of all, the best ideas, words and image combination came at the end of the book. The readers had to wade through a bunch of photos before they got to the really good stuff. Should they decide to slog it through to the end.

A lot of the questions that I raised at the beginning of the talk were either not answered with a great deal of thought or they were not answered at all. If the premise is flawed, then everything that follows is doomed.

As a result, I returned to square three or four. All the images were usable and the sequencing of the images in the books was acceptable. The glue that was supposed to hold everything together just wasn't there.

It took quite a while to get over the review, but it was absolutely correct and spot on. I was too close and in too much of a hurry to see the flaws in my project. After a lot of thought about the review of my book I came up with some big changes.

Slide 43

I had two books, not one. The strongest material, from "After the Memories" had to become one book. The second book, now titled "Memories of Academy Street" contained all the older photographs I made on Academy Street. Books need to be as long as they have to be, they don't have to have a specific number of pages to be good. The Southern Gothic folio didn't really fit in with the rest of the Academy Street photographs and with the addition of repairable film negatives I didn't lose volume or relevance.

Slide 44

The major flaws to be fixed were words, not images. I needed to change the text around the photograph to get the attitude of the photographs aligned with the overall theme of the project. I had to change the title of the first book from "A Walk Down Academy Street" to "Memories of Academy Street." The change was required to set up the sequel, "After the Memories." The text surrounding the three bodies of work was changed to support the new title and attitude.

Slide 45

Slide 46, 47

"After the Memories" design changed by making the modern images full bleed. The modern images now filled the page from corner to corner, eliminating the margins. The vintage images remained toned black and white images at their original size. This change made the modern images much more powerful and accentuated the difference between the past and the present. I rewrote or did major edits to the text element of the book. It became a fifty page book concentrating on the juxtaposition of the past and present views of Academy Street.

Slide 48

"After the Memories" left out one of the successful changes on Academy Street, the transformation of Cary Elementary School into the Cary Arts Center. I spent about three years working on the documentation of the Transformation of Cary Elementary School and I did not even have one pair of images showing one of the rare successes on Academy Street. I specifically made before and after images during the transformation and figured out I should add them to the book.

This addition created yet another problem. All the previous images have been exterior images and now the reader is indoors with no explanation. How does one explain and create context for the transition to indoor images?

Slide 49

Here is a page I wanted to use as an introduction to the photographs of the transformation of Cary Elementary. One of things important things we dealt with was sequencing the images to have the images and story flow together in a way that creates a rhythm for the reader. In AtM, the reader was used to seeing a small black and white image and some text on the left and a full bleed color image on the right. My addition of this page is kind of clunky and destroys the rhythm of the book. The problem yet to be solved is how to make a successful transition from the exterior to the interior world of change on Academy Street. That is some unfinished business…

Slide 50

All the folios that make up my books are accessible on my website. Please download the pdf documents and read them on your desktop. The documents work best that way. Your browser probably has an "acrobat helper" app that is no substitute for Adobe Reader.